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ABSTRACT

A new way of viewing the principal is to think of the principal as an orchestral conductor. Insights gained from this perspective may help in progressing toward more healthy and productive school organizations. Both the conductor and the principal are highly visible by virtue of their positions and function as intermediaries in their respective fields. Five dimensions that characterize the role of the conductor are the following: student; communicator; teacher; leader; and servant of the composer. Reframing the role of the principal in terms of those dimensions rests on four foundational premises: (1) adopting a holistic definition of learning; (2) learning methods and strategies that are effective in fostering this kind of learning; (3) seeing teachers as orchestral musicians; and (4) embracing a facilitative conception of power. Some ways of preparing present and future principals are offered along with ideas about how the staff and school system will have to change to fit the conductor framework. (Contains 29 references.) (MLF)

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The Principal as Orchestral Conductor

by David R. Luce

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To get a picture of a new way of viewing the principal, let us think of the principal as an orchestral conductor. For the purposes of this article, the title *conductor* shall refer to resident conductors of professional orchestras, hired jointly by the organizations' boards of trustees and representative members of the orchestras (Galkin 1988). Their official functions include selection and termination of orchestra personnel, selection of repertoire, planning and conducting rehearsals, and conducting performances.

In this article, I describe some similarities between the context of the conductor and that of today's principal. Insights we gain may free us from a perspective that may limit our progress toward more healthy and productive school organizations. Then I discuss five dimensions that characterize the role of a conductor. Next, I attempt to reframe the role of the principal in terms of those dimensions.

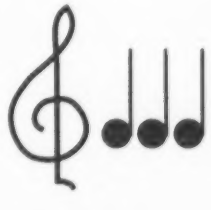
Obviously, principals will need to be trained to think and act in these new ways, so I suggest some ways of preparing present and future principals to be conductor-principals. Some ideas are offered about how the staff and school system will have to change to fit the conductor framework. Finally, conclusions are drawn regarding the strengths and weaknesses of this metaphor.

Similar Contexts

Both the conductor and the principal are highly visible by virtue of their positions. In earlier times, conductors may have sat at the piano or stood in the violin section, waving their bow or stamping their foot. Out of sight of the majority of the orchestra, they were of small influence. For some time, tradition placed the conductor diagonally "three quarters to the public." But since Wagner's example in 1865, the conductor has usually been positioned in the center of the stage, back to the audience, with every movement in the center of the listener's visual field.

The principal also occupies center stage. Traditionally, schools have been constructed with the principal's office near the front entrance and easily accessible. While the teacher's classroom door tends to remain closed, the principal's office is open to visitors, parents, and patrons. "Effective principals stand on the boundary between school and community, negotiating with the superintendent, supporting teachers in the face of attacks, and offering favorable images to the public" (Schmuck 1986, p. 67).

Another similarity between the contexts of the conductor and the principal is found in the ways they prepare for their positions. Both historically have received only cursory training in instructional programs. Upon entering the ranks, they began to learn their jobs. Until 1905, there were no conservatory programs in conducting (Galkin). Aspiring conductors began as instrumentalists under master conductors, observing



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until such time as they could procure a position of their own.

Today, however, nearly all conductors are products of courses of study in conducting. Colleges and universities, conservatories, and summer festivals provide curricular programs. Herbert von Karajan and Leonard Bernstein, the two most renowned conductors since 1950, were both students and influential teachers of conducting (Galkin).

Similarly, principals in the past began their careers in education as teachers (Tyack and Hansot 1982). Interestingly, the first full-fledged program in school administration was instituted at Teacher's College, Columbia, also in 1905. Earlier, in 1897, at Teacher's College, the local superintendent was asked to teach a one-year course on educational administration. He replied that he could teach everything he knew in six weeks (Culbertson 1987, p. 8). It was not until the 1930s that it became common for states to require specialized credentials and substantial training for administrators.

More recently, the principal has been thrust into a prominent role in the improvement of education. In response to this, administrative training programs are providing more relevant preparation for the job. Mentor-protegé programs have been established, pairing experienced and successful principals with fledgling administrators to structure growth and provide modeling and interaction with peers. Assessment centers developed by professional associations, such as NASSP, offer simulations of actual administrative tasks, then assist participants in designing ongoing professional development plans.

Another similarity between the two professions is the nature of their effects on the ultimate goal of the organization. Neither the conductor nor the principal directly affects the outcome of their efforts. The conductor is the only performer who does not generate music by physical contact with an instrument. The principal, while directly affecting certain outcomes in the school, affects student learning only indirectly (Rassmussen 1976).

Finally, both the conductor and the principal function as intermediaries in their respective fields. The conductor's ultimate task is to recreate, through the orchestra, what the composer intended when originally creating the score. Although principals should not merely be considered as "funnels," they have acted as liaisons within the organization. They represent their building and staff in dealings with the central office and local board and community; simultaneously they represent the school district to the building staff, the students, and the community.

Despite similarities between the contexts of the conductor and the principal, their roles, as presently defined, are quite different. Let us now look at the role of the conductor and begin to build a framework for viewing the principal as a conductor.

Roles of the Conductor

There are five dimensions that characterize the conductor: conductor as student, conductor as communicator, conductor as teacher, conductor as leader, and conductor as servant of the composer.

Conductor as student. First, the conductor is characterized as a student. The great conductors of the last one-hundred years began studying music at an early age. For example, Toscanini (1867-1957) entered Parma Conservatory at age nine and began a professional career as a cellist in his teens (Galkin). Stokowski (1882-1977), whose fame included his work with Walt Disney in *Fantasia*, was admitted to London's Royal College of Music at age thirteen. At fifteen, he became organist at St. James Church, Piccadilly.

The aspiring conductor must learn technique—a language of gesture—with which to communicate to the orchestra. This technique develops through intensive

study of the music, instruction, and endless practice. Conductors must know the music to such an extent that they can see behind the notes of the score into the mind of composers to learn their intentions.

Practicing technique means nothing less than standing before an orchestra and conducting. In times past, training grounds for conductors included many provincial orchestras; church choirs; assistantships with larger orchestras; and later, in the silent movie era, house orchestras in the theaters. The development of recording technology has eliminated most of these opportunities. Actual practice now can only be gained through formal training programs in the colleges and universities, conservatories, and summer festivals under master conductors.

Conductor as communicator. Communication, for conductors, is much more than just sender, message, and receiver. They must sense the attitude of the players toward them and toward the music. They must be aware of their moods, both individually and collectively. Personal problems affect the players' receptivity and contribution and must be reckoned with. Conductors' awareness of and sensitivity to all these considerations tempers their technique.

Conductor as teacher. The third dimension of the conductor role is that of teacher. The conductor functions as a *maestro* or teacher of the orchestra and as a teacher of the community. The conductor, with a balance of humility and conviction, teaches to expand the players' frame of reference. In a piece of music players already know, conductors teach them their own interpretation. Even from one performance to the next, conductors may learn something new and adjust their teaching accordingly. In a new piece, the conductor must get orchestra members familiar enough with it to recognize the relative importance of the many passages they play.

By virtue of their visible and influential positions, conductors are teachers of the community, working to heighten the musical awareness of the public. By selecting the works to be performed, conductors teach the public about styles old and new. Their emphasis on certain works and composers influences the tastes of the audience.

Conductor as leader. The conductor has the authority to dismiss members of the orchestra. In the past, conductors used this power to *command* their orchestras to *inspired* performances. They could be likened to the heartless field general who took no thought of sending young men to certain death. But abusive leaders are no longer condoned in the modern world of musicians' unions (Galkin, 658). Conductors now act as collaborators with their fellow performers, escorting them, urging them, but never inhibiting them.

Conductor as servant of the composer. The dictionary defines the word *conductor* as a "leader, a guide, an escort." Artur Schnabel (1942, pp. 63-64) made an analogy between the role of conductor and that of a mountain guide: the mountain guide "must see to it that his charge, the guided climber, is more concerned with the mountain than with the guide. Otherwise he would not be a good guide."

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Reframing the Principal's Role

Let us take a fresh look at the role of principal by applying to it the same five dimensions we applied to the conductor role.

Principal as student. Conductor-principals are distinguished early in life as exceptional students with a love for learning and a propensity for growth. Particularly, respect for others and strong communication skills are acquired and demonstrated at a young age. As these qualities manifest themselves, children's parents and teachers may expose them to experiences that further exercise those skills and build their capacity for leadership. After completion of undergraduate study, the young aspirants then train in the art of pedagogy, acquiring a wide variety of methods and skills, and enter the educational profession as classroom teachers (Thomson 1989). Through years of experience in various schools, under the batons of various principals, they develop as instructional leaders. They influence others, both students and colleagues, through their expertise and vision. They

With making of great "music" as the ultimate aim, you must start with a definition of learning to which you can commit your whole being.

continue to develop professionally through postgraduate study of educational administration, which involves practical experience under mentor principals.

Principal as communicator. Conductor-principals bring their extensive knowledge and experience to bear on school organizations through their expertise as communicators. Their highly developed interpersonal communication skills are grounded in openness. Their modeling influences school norms, encouraging staff, students, and parents to improve their communication skills; it also builds trust among them (Barth 1985). They recognize that informal communications networks exist among those subgroups, and supplement those by building formal "link-pin structures" (Likert 1961). Clear and specific delegation of authority also acts as a substitute for their presence (Pitner 1986).

Principal as teacher. Principals act as teachers of the school staff and of the school's community. In addition, they teach students in the classroom.

The principals' orchestras, the school staffs, are trained professionals; however, their capacity and willingness to make the music varies (Bridges 1990). Some have the scope of vision and the motivation to collaborate with the principal on the interpretation of the score. Others less able or less inclined need training and assistance to successfully play their part. Principals, like conductors, strive to expand the players' frame of reference. Principals, like conductors, should possess three qualities to effectively teach the staff: they must listen to each other, they must have the vision to understand their part in the larger context, and they must be flexible enough to adapt to their context, in effect creating the proverbial sum that is greater than its parts.

Conductor-principals understand and respect the needs and motives of the adults they teach. They make them responsible for their own learning, collaborating with them to design professional growth plans and assisting them in monitoring and evaluating that growth.

Principals-as-conductors recognize their roles as teachers of the community, and focus on building an appreciation and love for the "music"—learning. They are not interested in self-aggrandizement or in creating folk-heroes of their staffs (Killion and others 1989). They keep the attention on the learners and the learning and celebrate learning through the local media.

Conductor-principals also teach students. They may not work with students in a regularly scheduled class, but do so in a regularly scheduled way, whether through tutoring, short-term projects, or a remedial class. Such a commitment to teaching sends clear messages: that the principal likes and values the basic work of the school; that some of the passion that fed an early career is still there; that the principal knows how it feels to teach in the school; and that the principal is in position to offer pedagogical counsel and advice on the basis of more than distant memory.

Principal as servant of the composer. Some principals have no well-defined priorities other than keeping small problems from becoming big ones. They respond to emergencies daily, operating in a crisis management mode. They are always on call. All problems are seen as equally important. This global response to any and all concerns means they never have the time, energy, or inclination to develop and carry out a set of premeditated plans of their own. Containment of all problems is their theme. Principals who function this way are not effective leaders (Fullan 1982, p. 132).

There must be a guiding theme to focus the school for action. Principals are meant to establish a sense of direction and focus in their own actions and those of others by subjugating themselves to the intent of the composer. For our purposes, consider the score to be the community's vision for the education of their young, articulated in board policy and carried out in the school organization. Citizens help write the score through the election of the school board; participation in the budget process; and other citizen committee projects, such as parent advisory committees, 21st century committees, or the local P.T.A. State elections and policy decisions are affected by citizen input as well, which broadens citizen influence beyond local boundaries.

How Might a Principal Begin to Act More Like a Conductor?

For principals to begin to act like conductors, they must think of themselves as conductors. This involves much more than adding yet another set of behaviors to their repertoire. Sergiovanni said,

> Rationality requires that models be offered as frames of reference that can enhance the vision of professionals at work and inform their intuition and judgment as they practice; *not as truths to be applied.* (1987, p. 49)

It takes serious effort on the part of individuals to think in a new framework (Fullan). And the conductor framework rests on four foundational premises: adopting a holistic definition of learning;

learning methods and strategies that are effective in fostering this kind of learning: seeing teachers as orchestral musicians; and embracing a facilitative conception of power.

A new framework for a definition of learning. Before one can begin to behave in new ways, one must start thinking in new ways. Start with the music. What is learning? Standardized test scores are about as musical as the sound of a referee's whistle. The whistling, while a sound, communicates no richness of meaning, and elicits as a response the angry jeers from a disapproving crowd. Test scores reveal little about the growth and health of the whole child. And since the *Nation At Risk* report was published in 1983, the crowd has been jeering.

With the making of great "music" as the ultimate aim, you must start with a definition of learning to which you can commit your whole being. If learning is viewed as merely the improvement of student achievement scores, the goals of learning are fairly narrow. If, on the other hand, learning is defined holistically, then student behaviors, perception, emotions, and physiology must also be addressed (Glasser 1986). Based on this definition, the focus in professional development efforts, for instance, becomes broadening each staff member's sense of their mission.

A new framework for models of teaching. After careful study and reflection to understand what learning is, you can begin to think about how learning occurs. Just as the conductor studied music and how to produce it on his instrument, so must the principal. There is considerable research on how teachers can affect student outcomes. Principals must search for those methods and strategies shown to produce holistic learning.

Teacher and student behaviors that were once considered inappropriate may now become a vital part of the learning process.

Traditionally, active student participation in class has often been limited to raised-hand communication with the teacher. Cooperative learning structures incorporate student-student interaction to increase understanding and build transfer of knowledge across disciplines. Until recently, monitoring student behavior was the responsibility of the teacher. However, classrooms in which student judiciary councils rule on discipline infractions are returning that sense of responsibility to the students (Gathercoal 1990).

A new framework for teaching as work. Conductors' assumptions about the roles of the musicians in the orchestra influence how they define their own role. The third central conception principals must reflect upon is the nature of teaching as work. Darling-Hammond, Wise, and Pease (1983) suggest four possible ways of conceptualizing teaching—teaching as labor, teaching as craft, teaching as profession, and teaching as art. Each makes some assumptions about the nature of work and the relationship between principals and teachers.

Assumptions within the labor framework include the need for rational planning, programs, routines, standard operating procedures, and so forth. Evaluation involves direct inspection to ensure compliance to top-down standards, with the principal acting as a supervisor.

The craft framework calls forth the image of a repertoire of specialized techniques. Once knowledge of these techniques and the general rules for their application has been demonstrated, only indirect evaluation is necessary by the principal-as-manager to hold teachers to general performance standards.

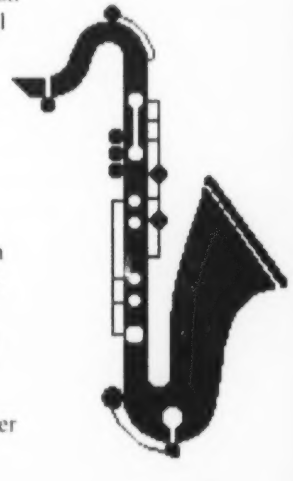
The framework of teaching-as-profession seems to require a repertoire of specialized techniques plus the exercise of judgment about when those techniques should be applied.

The teaching-as-art framework implies that teaching techniques and their application may be novel and unconventional. Teaching is personalized, not standardized, and requires intuition, improvisation, creativity, and expressiveness.

The framework of teacher-as-orchestral-musician incorporates aspects of each of the other perspectives. Musicians, as defined in the beginning of this paper, fit the craft framework. They are masters of technique and form. Additionally, as artists, they value intuition, creativity, expressiveness, and improvisation. Also, as professionals, their interpretations of the music are considered valid (Blackman 1964; Bamberger 1965). However, when they come together to make music as a group, individuals voluntarily give up some of the unpredictable aspects of the artist to achieve the goal of cohesiveness. Playing together means agreeing upon some conventions of style, technique, and interpretation.

Begin to conceive of teachers as musicians by seeing them in their context. See teachers as craftspersons who have mastered the basic techniques of teaching. See teachers as professionals who can exercise judgment based upon up-to-date-knowledge, and can act using a wide variety of methods and strategies as they determine appropriate. See teachers as artists: intuitive, creative, innovative, and committed to their interpretation of good teaching. Now bring these teacher-musicians into the context of the orchestra, the school organization.

A new framework for power in schools. A conductor-principal cannot hope to maximize teacher effectiveness and establish norms of mutual respect and concern with power in the traditional sense. Recently, Dunlap and Goldman (1991) offered a new framework for thinking about power in schools. Their concept of facilitative power



fits quite well with the conductor metaphor.

Facilitative power reflects a process that, by creating and sustaining favorable conditions, allows subordinates to enhance their individual and collective performance. Facilitative power is manifested not *over* others but *through* others.

Harold Farberman, musician, composer, and conductor, stated, "The conductor's greatest asset is his orchestra. If he is not all he should be equipment-wise, his men, *if* he has their loyalty, will pull him through the rough spots" (cited in Blackman). Similarly, as principals exercise facilitative power, they focus not on control but on facilitating others' knowledge, talents, and expertise. In turn, as staff members are empowered to use one another's knowledge and skills, their personal capacities are increased.

Begin by holding a series of open dialogues with staff about the definition of learning and what constitutes good teaching. You can share your core beliefs, your absolutes, those nonnegotiables; together you can generate new conceptions about what the school and its members are about. Use these dialogues to collaboratively create performance criteria for teachers. If your district has already adopted criteria, redefine them to fit your new framework, negotiate to rank order the criteria, and agree on what is important to your building. This set of expectations then becomes the basis from which professional development plans are designed.

By having ownership in the selection, definition, and ordering of their own performance criteria, staff will see teacher evaluation as valid. Interestingly, staff who help develop their own performance standards tend to set higher standards than those imposed upon them by the administration (Conley 1987).

Implications for Staff Change

Changing only the role of principals and their expectations for the other players will not have any lasting effect on the organization. Schmuck and Runkel remind us that "the systemlike nature of schools requires one part to change along with all other parts if changes are to be sustained" (1988, p. 97). The teaching staff must change to accommodate the conductor framework. The staff must develop an interdependent relationship with the other players in the organization. First, all teachers must take on the musician's responsibility to play their parts the best they can be played. In contrast to mere participation, Sergiovanni uses the musical term *performance* to describe teachers "deciding to exceed the limits of traditional work relationships" (1989). Teachers must have a sense of ownership of their professional development. They must actively create their own professional goals and growth plans, and engage purposefully in their own evaluation. In addition, they must recognize that the school depends on their rendering a consistently high performance.

Other aspects of schools must also change to create an environment in which a principal might behave as a conductor.

Second, as musicians voluntarily give up some of their individualistic, autonomous tendencies for the sake of a unified orchestral sound, so must teachers come together and realize their place in the ensemble. Their conception of teaching must broaden from teaching in a classroom to teaching in a school community.

Implications for Systems Change

The conductor-principal framework, to be effective as a model for site-based management, will require changes in the larger educational system. School-based management rests on two propositions: (1) decisions should be made at the lowest possible level of the organization; and (2) change requires ownership that comes from the opportunity to participate in defining change, and the flexibility to adapt the change to the specific circumstances of the school (David 1989).

The primary difference between school-based management and centralized management is that the school staff, instead of district staff, initiates and leads innovation (Guthrie 1986). The central office and the school board must send clear signals that they value and will reward the collaborative efforts of the conductor and the orchestra.

Summary and Conclusions

The principalship is considered by some to be the pivotal force in improving schools (Anderson 1991). This view reinforces the functional nature of the role. Principals must provide the guidance and assistance that teachers cannot provide for themselves. To do so, principals must build communication links both inside and outside the organization. When principals provide teachers with what is needed, three things usually happen: (1) staff members are empowered to participate, (2) staff members take ownership, and (3) better decisions are made by the people who are best suited to make them.

Other aspects of schools must also change to create an environment in which a principal might behave as a conductor. Staff members must become musicians. They must assume responsibility for their

own performance and continued professional growth.

Changes must also occur at the district level, where centralized systems must delegate decision-making authority to the site level, particularly budgetary, curricular, and staffing decisions. Further, exemptions from board policy and legal and contractual obligations should be made available through waiver provisions to expand the range of innovations possible at the school-site level.

To provide the guidance and assistance teachers may need, principals must thoroughly understand the learning process and possess a wealth of knowledge, skills, and experience in teaching, which only come from sound training and reflective practice.

Currently, Oregon principal certification requirements include one university course in educational leadership and one course in school supervision or personnel evaluation. School law and budgeting are required managerial topics. Also required is a practicum experience in an administrative capacity. These requirements, while potentially valuable experiences, are by no means adequate to prepare principals to become conductors.

For certification training to become a critical component in the preparation of conductor-principals, it must bridge the gap between university classroom learning and real school experience. The courses mentioned above currently incorporate bridging procedures such as simulations and case studies. To increase their relevance to the aspiring conductor-principal, four areas need to be addressed (Bridges 1977). First, simulations must prepare aspirants for the pace of principals' work, which is more hectic than the pace demanded of students during their university training. Second, students must be forced to cope with the emotions of others, and have opportunities to observe experts constructively and openly work through emotionally difficult situations. Third, conflict resolution through collaboration must be taught and practiced in stressful circumstances similar to those encountered by principals in their daily routines. Fourth, modes of communication relevant to principals' work are different from those important to success in a university setting. Training should include simulations that require face-to-face interactions like those that occupy up so much of a principal's day.

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